

Your Guide to the Updated Nutrition Facts Label

By [Kris Sollid, R.D.](#) | May 31 2016



Since coming to the White House seven-plus years ago, Michelle Obama, the First Lady of the United States (FLOTUS), has been a champion for food and fitness. Today at the Partnership for a Healthier America meeting, FLOTUS announced that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), has a change in store for our food labels—one that will be appearing in stores soon. [A new Nutrition Facts label](#) is on its way, and among many things, it will include a line for added sugars, making it the first new line to appear on the label since [trans fat](#) debuted in 2006. Added sugars information will appear as “Includes X g Added Sugars” starting in 2018.

Including a New Line for Total Sugars

Of all the [label updates](#) considered by the FDA, this is arguably the most complicated. The decision to include added sugars information is based on the [conclusions](#) of the recently released *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (DGAs) in the continued effort to help people eat more healthfully. Including added sugars information on the label is thought to help with this. This new line for added sugars will appear indented directly below “Total Sugars,” a line previously just labeled as “Sugars.” “Total Sugars” will be indented directly below “Total Carbohydrate.” See the label below for an example.

Including the word “Total” in the “Sugars” line above “Includes Added Sugars” may not seem like a big deal now, but it may pay off big for consumers later. Before any label changes can go into effect, the FDA is required to conduct consumer research on the reaction to potential label changes, which they did in July and August 2014 ^{1,2} and February and March 2015 ^{3,4}.

We here at the [IFIC Foundation](#) also conducted research on consumer interpretations of the new label, with emphasis on added sugars. Interestingly, both the FDA and IFIC Foundation independently found that using “Total Sugars” on the label in place of “Sugars” seems to help consumers understand that the amount of sugars appearing as added sugars is included in the amount displayed in the line above it, not in addition to it.

Current:

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 2/3 cup (55g)	
Servings Per Container About 8	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 230	Calories from Fat 72
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 8g	12%
Saturated Fat 1g	5%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 160mg	7%
Total Carbohydrate 37g	12%
Dietary Fiber 4g	16%
Sugars 1g	
Protein 3g	
Vitamin A	10%
Vitamin C	8%
Calcium	20%
Iron	45%
* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily value may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.	
	Calories: 2,000 2,500
Total Fat	Less than 65g 80g
Sat Fat	Less than 20g 25g
Cholesterol	Less than 300mg 300mg
Sodium	Less than 2,400mg 2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate	300g 375g
Dietary Fiber	25g 30g

New:

Nutrition Facts	
8 servings per container	
Serving size	2/3 cup (55g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	230
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 8g	10%
Saturated Fat 1g	5%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 160mg	7%
Total Carbohydrate 37g	13%
Dietary Fiber 4g	14%
Total Sugars 12g	
Includes 10g Added Sugars	20%
Protein 3g	
Vitamin D 2mcg	10%
Calcium 260mg	20%
Iron 8mg	45%
Potassium 235mg	6%
* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.	

Putting the New Label into Practice

Want to practice on the new label? Check out this game to test your label-reading skills:

Nutrition Facts 10 serving per package Serving size 1/10 package (43g) Amount per 1 container Calories 160 % DV* <table border="1"> <tr><td>Total Fat 4g</td><td>6%</td></tr> <tr><td>Saturated Fat 1.5g</td><td>8%</td></tr> <tr><td>Trans Fat 0g</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Cholesterol 0mg</td><td>0%</td></tr> <tr><td>Sodium 80mg</td><td>3%</td></tr> <tr><td>Total Carbs 33g</td><td>11%</td></tr> <tr><td>Dietary Fiber 0g</td><td>0%</td></tr> <tr><td>Total Sugars 18g</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Includes 16g Added Sugars</td><td>32%</td></tr> <tr><td>Protein 11g</td><td></td></tr> </table> INGREDIENTS: X, Y, Z	Total Fat 4g	6%	Saturated Fat 1.5g	8%	Trans Fat 0g		Cholesterol 0mg	0%	Sodium 80mg	3%	Total Carbs 33g	11%	Dietary Fiber 0g	0%	Total Sugars 18g		Includes 16g Added Sugars	32%	Protein 11g		Where would this appear? sugar in cake 
	Total Fat 4g	6%																			
	Saturated Fat 1.5g	8%																			
	Trans Fat 0g																				
	Cholesterol 0mg	0%																			
	Sodium 80mg	3%																			
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Protein 11g																					
<input type="checkbox"/> Total Sugars <input type="checkbox"/> Added Sugars <input type="checkbox"/> Ingredients <input type="button" value="Find Out!"/>	select all the apply																				

While some (present company included) have discussed the potential for the public to misinterpret added sugars information on the new label, today's announcement has me thinking differently—it's time to focus more on how the information *should* be used, not *if* it should be there. If you want to learn more about the science used to support the inclusion of added sugars, check out the sidebar on the right.

There is no doubt that added sugars information will cause people to pause, at first. The hope is that the information, eventually, is understood as intended. The FDA and IFIC Foundation studies showed that between 24 percent and 45 percent of people incorrectly perceived added sugars information on the new labels. In these studies, the most common mistake made by people attempting to identify a total amount of sugar was adding the "Total Sugars" and "Added Sugars" lines together.

The intriguing part about this is that there is no math to do here—the *total* amount of sugars is the amount found in the "Total Sugars" line (12 grams in the label shown above). The amount of sugar *added* is found in the "Includes Added Sugars" line (10 grams in the label shown above). To determine the amount of sugar that occurs naturally in any food or drink, you can subtract added sugars from total sugars ($12 - 10 = 2$ grams of naturally occurring sugar in the label above).

It's clear that education will need to be a big part of the new label rollout, particularly when it comes to added sugars. After all, that's what the "E" in the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act ([NLEA](#)) stands for.

Speaking of education, how educated are you on what qualifies as an added sugar? Check out this game to test your skills.

Math and Science Can Be Complicated. Your Diet Doesn't Have To Be.

The new "Includes Added Sugars" line will include information presented in grams, but as a %Daily Value (DV) as well. The %DV for added sugars is based on the new FDA Daily Reference Value (DRV) of 10 percent of total calories, which equates to 50 grams of added sugars (or 200 calories) per day, and based on the standard reference of a 2,000-calorie diet. Take note that you may require more or less than 2,000 calories per day to maintain a healthy weight. If so, the recommended intake of less than 10 percent of calories from added sugars stays the same, but the absolute amount of added sugars will vary.

The %DV displays the percentage of your daily maximum (or minimum) found in a particular product. This can be a hard [concept](#) to grasp, so here's a quick example: If a product contains 20 grams of added sugars, the %DV would be 40 percent. Why? Because 20 grams is 40 percent of 50 grams ($20/50 = 40$ percent), and 50 grams of added sugars (per 2,000 calories) is the amount that FDA has established as the max we should eat per day.

Did I lose you? An easy rule of thumb to use is the 5/20 rule. A %DV of 5 or less is considered "low" and a %DV of 20 or more is considered "high."

Talking about the science behind food issues is complicated, especially added sugars and the labeling of it. Talking about how to build a healthy diet doesn't have to be quite so complicated. The same approach to building a healthy eating style still applies, even when the new label arrives—added sugars and all. Added sugars will continue to provide calories without nutrients, just as added sugars will continue to be part of healthy foods that we all enjoy. The new label offers a benefit to those who wish to keep track of the added sugars they consume, with the intention being to help those who consume too many added sugars to consume less.

If you read labels, keep at it. If you don't, maybe the new food label is a good reason to start. Paying attention to food labels is a great first step toward improving your health, but don't limit your focus to added sugars. When using the new label, don't lose sight of the bigger nutrition picture: Sugar is just one piece of the puzzle.